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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001073

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STATE FOR SA/INS  
USPACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: JVP JUMPS SHIP; PRESIDENT PADDLING  
FURIOUSLY

REF: COLOMBO 1065

Classified By: AMB. JEFFREY J. LUNSTEAD. REASON: 1.4 (B,D).

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SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: As threatened, on June 16 coalition partner Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) left the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) government after President Chandrika Kumaratunga refused to meet its demand to abandon the so-called "joint mechanism" on tsunami aid with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The JVP's defection leaves the President with the unpleasant prospect of heading a minority government. Possible next steps include seeking support from the main opposition party, proroguing Parliament when it reconvenes on June 22, or presenting the mechanism to Parliament. The JVP, meanwhile, has invited all patriotic Sri Lankans to form a new alliance. It appears that the party, known for its strategic thinking and long-term planning, may have miscalculated for once. End summary.

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JVP PULLS PLUG ON UPFA PARTNERSHIP  
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[1](#)2. (U) As threatened, at 8:00 a.m. local time on June 16 the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) left the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) government after President Chandrika Kumaratunga did not meet the party's June 15 deadline to desist from pursuing a "joint mechanism" on tsunami aid with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Four JVP Cabinet Ministers formally resigned their portfolios (Culture and Heritage; Agriculture and Irrigation; Small Industries; and Fisheries) later in the morning. The JVP defection costs Kumaratunga's government 39 seats in Parliament (leaving her as the head of a minority government), as well as control of all seven Provincial Councils. In a letter to JVP General Secretary Tilvin Silva on June 15 (the contents of which were

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read out over television that evening), the President urged the party not to abandon the alliance because of misunderstandings over the joint mechanism, the text of which the JVP had never even seen.

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PATRIOTS ONLY, PLEASE  
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[1](#)3. (U) At a press conference the morning of June 16, the JVP leadership claimed that it had been forced to leave the alliance because the proposed joint mechanism threatened Sri Lanka's national sovereignty. Party leaders pledged to form a new alliance and invited patriots nationwide--including any disaffected sons of the soil from Kumaratunga's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) or the mainstream opposition United National Party (UNP) to join. JVP Leader Somawansa Amarasinghe expressed regret for not having been able to fulfill all of the promises the party made during the last election, but pledged to do so when the JVP regains power at an unspecified time in the future. (Note: None of the five JVP speakers--Amarasinghe, Silva, Propaganda Secretary Wimal Weerawansa, and former Ministers Anura Dissanayake and Lal Kantha--made any reference to impending elections or plans to bring down the government. End note.)

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WHEN PARLIAMENT RECONVENES:  
WHETHER TO PROROGUE OR POLITICK?  
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[1](#)4. (C) With no immediate JVP move apparent to topple the government, the next crucial date for the President will occur when Parliament reconvenes on June 22. As noted reftel, observers speculate that Kumaratunga may choose to prorogue Parliament, thereby gaining up to two months of breathing space, or may attempt to bring the joint mechanism before Parliament for a vote. The Attorney General told us on June 16 that he is not entirely sure how that might be done--he is still "studying it"--but suggested that the

government might bring the proposed agreement as a motion before Parliament. The motion could then be carried by a simple majority, which, given the pledges of support from the UNP and the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) for the joint mechanism, the government should have sufficient votes to secure. On the other hand, if the government pursues this course of action, events are unlikely to transpire in such a simple, straightforward fashion. For example, before a vote takes place, the motion could be challenged before the Supreme Court, a step the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) has already vowed to undertake if the joint mechanism comes before Parliament.

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FAST FINISHED  
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15. (SBU) Acting on a court order, police removed fasting monk Ven. Dambara Amila Thero from the railway station in downtown Colombo late June 15 (Reftel), despite vociferous objections from his surrounding supporters, and took him to the hospital. The streets of Colombo were quiet on June 16, although police sources expressed concern about reports that the JVP-aligned student union was attempting to mobilize students from all 13 universities for an anti-mechanism protest in the capital on June 17.

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COMMENT  
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16. (C) No one--including the JVP--wants elections now, and Kumaratunga faces the unattractive prospect of running a minority government for the immediate future. Running a minority government, however, may be only marginally more difficult than running a government with a contentious coalition partner that opposed nearly every initiative she proposed. Kumaratunga is often criticized (usually with good grounds) for short-term, ad hoc thinking, impulsiveness and inattention to detail. This proclivity usually puts her at a disadvantage with adversaries like the LTTE and JVP, both masters of long-term, strategic planning. This time, however, it looks like the JVP may have miscalculated, assuming Kumaratunga's cave-ins to JVP pressure on a number of previous showdowns (e.g., restructuring of the electricity utility, privatization of university education) meant that she would follow suit on this issue as well. But the JVP can be expected to try to turn this miscalculation to advantage, using its spare time--and enhanced position as ultra-nationalists--to build up its ever-expanding base.  
LUNSTEAD